**Critical Friends Protocol**

(Adapted from ISSAC 2007 E2E Study Groups: 21st Century Skills in the Classroom)

**Purpose of Critical Friends Study Groups**

The structured Critical Friends Protocol is designed to improve instruction through reflection on student work. The Presenting Teaching Team will bring copies for each teacher participant in the study group of the following: the collaborative lesson plan, the assignment directions, the evaluation criteria, and 3 samples of student work. Sample 1 will be an example that meets expectations. Sample 2 goes beyond the expectations of the lesson. Sample 3 does not meet the expectations of the lesson. (See *Criteria for Selecting Student Work Samples* below).

At each study group session we will share and gather input on our collaborative lesson plan, the assignment directions, the evaluation criteria and student work samples. We will reflect on feedback we receive, engage in conversations on formative assessments of student learning, and share effective research based strategies. We will also complete the ToTLE E2E Reflection Journal. Between each session we will have an opportunity to read selected articles on formative assessments, post our reflections and join in discussion on the Wiki.

**Critical Friends Study Group Code of Conduct**

1. Establish trust and confidentiality.

2. Discuss and develop norms about how to give feedback and how to question in a sensitive manner so everyone feels comfortable.

3. Keep comments in the room.

4. Reflect on the work by confronting assumptions, mindsets, and expectations, but never by blaming students or social conditions.

5. Be flexible, balancing spontaneity with equal access for all to participate.

6. Debrief what was helpful or not in the feedback process.

**Strategic Questions that Unearth Valuable Lessons**

Strategic questions are intended to help the Study Group delve deeper into the thinking behind the student and teacher learning process. These are questions that the Presenting Teaching Team does not answer, but should cause all participants to reflect. The end result of these questions is to help all participants uncover student thinking and/or instructional flaws. These questions can be a little difficult to create initially. This handout is designed to act as a guide in creating these questions.

**Important things to remember in starting off:**

* Questions are not meant to be judgmental.
* Questions should not generate a “yes” or “no” answer.
* Questions are aimed at helping to explore the assignment and aid in the discovery of student misconceptions.

**Questions should start with:**

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| Imagine if … | What is another way we might … |
| What would happen if … | What evidence can we find that suggests … |
| What do the students think … | What evidence confirms our hypothesis concerning … |
| Help me think about how … | What other strategies might have worked in this situation? |

**Comments that Destroy Trust**

Participants must remember that this process may make the Presenting Team feel vulnerable. It will be important not to break trust by being judgmental, condescending, or exalting.

Please remember:

* These questions should not place blame or praise.
* Participants should not act as though they have all the answers.
* Make sure the questions are aimed at helping to explore the assignment.

Questions and comments to avoid include:

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| --- | --- |
| This activity does not meet the standard … | I did … in my class …, what works well is … |
| This activity does not meet the UDL Principle … | This is the best lesson I have ever seen. |
| Why on earth did you …? | This student clearly missed the mark. |

Remember to use questions that lead to deeper thinking and exploration. More Facilitator sample questions are included in Part 3 *The Facilitator Protocol* and Part 4 *Critical Friends Protocol: While the Presenting Team listens the Critical Friends discuss with Facilitator probing***.**

**Criteria for Selecting Lesson Plan and Student Work Samples**

* Did you remove names and any other identifying information from the samples?
* Do you have a question or concern about the **lesson plan** which was challenging to teach and that your colleagues can help you resolve? This is an opportunity to find creative approaches to teaching and learning.
* Do you have questions about the **directions** you gave the students? Bring copies of all **assignment materials** the students received.
* Do you have questions about the **rubric or evaluation criteria** the students received? Bring copies for colleagues.
* The three **student work samples need to be easily viewable** such as written notes, printed presentations, printed spreadsheets or brochures. If you want your colleagues to comment on 3 multimedia products plan to show them.
* Do the work samples address **multiple standards and benchmarks** e.g. science or social studies and Information and Technology Literacy and Language Arts?
* Do the student samples **result in one or two days** of classroom work? Student work is the day-to-day data that informs instruction.

**Evidence to Excellence (E2E) Reflection Journal**

**Part 1.** The Presenting Teaching Team prepares for the Critical Friends Study Group Session.

Prior to the workshop, please answer the following questions. They will help you in preparing to share your students’ work with your colleagues.

A. **Identify** the **UDL Principles** such as **Representation** (various ways to obtain information), **Expression** (various ways to demonstrate knowledge gained, **Engagement** (various ways to challenge and motivate students) and **SDJ Benchmarks** being addressed.

B. **Identify** the **essential understandings**. (What should the student know, understand and be able to do?)

C. What will be accepted as **evidence that the students understand**?

D. Briefly **describe** any **relevant lessons/activities that preceded** the lesson you will share.

E. **How** did you **present the lesson** to the students?

F. **Describe the assignment** and any **technology used**.

**Protocols for Effective Critical Friends Discussions**

**Part 2. The Teaching Team Protocol:** The Teaching Team shares the lesson plan, assignment, and assessments while Critical Friends listen

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| **Looks Like** | **Sounds Like** |
| 1. Teaching team states what they assumed would happen. | *We planned to …. So that the students would ….* |
| 2. Teaching team describes their reasoning for why they planned a certain way | *We arrived at this conclusion because …* |
| 3. Teaching team gives concrete examples. | *Let us explain how we saw this work at another school or during a conference presentation.* |
| 4. Teaching team reveals their perspective. | *We acknowledge that we are looking at this from the perspective of a first year team.* |
| 5. Teaching team anticipates other’s perspectives. | *Some of you are likely to question ….* |
| 6. Teaching team acknowledges areas of uncertainty. | *Here is an issue you can help us think through.* |
| 7. Teaching team invites others to question their assumptions and conclusions. | *What is your reaction to what we said? In what ways do you see things differently?* |

**Part 3. The Facilitator Protocol**: The Facilitator probes the Critical Friends while the Teaching Team listens.

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| **Looks Like** | **Sounds Like** |
| 1. Gently probe underlying logic. | *What led you to that conclusion?* |
| 2. Use nonaggressive language | *Can you help me understand your thinking here?* |
| 3. Draw out their thinking. | *Which aspects of what you have proposed do you feel are most significant or essential?* |
| 4. Check for understanding. | *I’m hearing that our primary goal is ….* |
| 5. Explain your reason for inquiring. | *I’m asking about your assumption because I feel ….* |

(Adapted from Dufour et.al. *Learning from Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*. Solution Tree Press, 2006. Page 105)